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COMMUNICATION

WASHINGTON, D. C., April 13, 1912.

TO THE BOARD OF EDITORS OF THE AMERICAN HISTORICAL REVIEW,
Gentlemen:

Will you kindly permit us, in the interest of historical accuracy, to correct certain statements contained in the review of our memoir on the *Omaha Tribe* in the *Twenty-Seventh Annual Report* of the Bureau of American Ethnology, which appeared in the April number of your periodical.

The reviewer cites Mr. J. Owen Dorsey, the author of *Omaha Sociology* which appeared in the *Third Annual Report* of the Bureau of American Ethnology, as an authority on Omaha history and customs. As Mr. Dorsey is no longer living, the writers wished to avoid any controversy concerning his account of the tribe, although they were aware that his work contained numerous inaccuracies. Mr. Dorsey's mistakes arose, not only from his imperfect knowledge of the language but also from his inability to distinguish between information honestly given him by serious-minded persons and misleading information given in jest by mischief-loving individuals. His mistakes have been corrected without drawing specific attention to any of them in the *Twenty-Seventh Annual Report* of the Bureau of American Ethnology, but the misstatements made in your review of that report make it necessary to break silence.

Mr. Dorsey, whom the reviewer quotes, in his *Omaha Sociology* (*Third Rep.*, p. 255) gives what purports to be the genealogy of Joseph LaFlesche and makes him out to be a Ponca. The genealogy that Mr. Dorsey gives is not that of Joseph LaFlesche, but of his half-brother Frank, whose mother was a Ponca. Joseph and Frank had the same father but different mothers. Joseph's mother was an Omaha and belonged to the Inkéçabe gens; she was the full sister of the father of Tahézhinga who died recently; his sons are still living and known to be members of that gens and blood cousins of the children of Joseph LaFlesche. No'-ço'-da-zhi, a full Omaha and a half-brother of LaFlesche, both having had the same mother, still lives; a full sister of the former and a half-sister of the latter, named Eshno'-mo'-he, died recently. These facts in no way bear out the statement of Mr. Dorsey. Moreover, when the writers told LaFlesche that Mr. Dorsey had made this statement, he laughed and said, "That is impossible!" The story of the early life of Joseph LaFlesche was well known to the writers, but the reference

to Wa-jé-pa (*Twenty-Seventh Rep.*, p. 631) was given because he was a near relative and known to the tribe as a man of strict probity and versed in his family history.

The reviewer says, "Our authors, moreover, permit the reader to get the impression that Joseph LaFlesche was the legitimate successor of Big Elk." The facts briefly told are: Big Elk, as he lay dying, requested LaFlesche, in the presence of other chiefs, to take care of his son, then a lad, and to see that he succeeded his father when he became of age, failing which Joseph himself was to be the successor. He took the lad into his own family and sent him to the mission school, where he died. LaFlesche was then, in accordance with the wish of Big Elk, recognized as his successor. There is no ground for the statement made as to "attempted usurpation of the Omaha chieftainship". The deposition referred to was omitted because it was of personal rather than tribal significance and was brought about by a disappointed Indian agent. The reviewer states that the authors "admit that his [Joseph LaFlesche's] installation was incomplete", but fails to point out where this admission is made. Possibly he had in mind the story given by Mr. Dorsey and credited to Frank LaFlesche (*Third Rep.*, p. 224), which is an example of Mr. Dorsey's numerous mistakes due to the lack of a clear understanding of the Omaha language which he persistently used while carrying on his inquiries. The story was about the accidental dropping of one of the bowls of the two tribal pipes at an initiation. It did not happen at the installation of LaFlesche; he was already a chief. This initiation was a step toward higher rank in chieftainship, and the ritual of the sacred tribal pipes had to be recited, at which time only the initiated could be present. During the recital Mo'-hi'-çi dropped the bowl of one of the sacred pipes accidentally. This meant death to the person being initiated and necessitated the discontinuance of the ceremony. Big Elk, who was present, became silent and showed much displeasure. Seeing this, Mo'-hi'-çi said to LaFlesche, "My son, this was an accident; whatever must follow I will take it upon myself." In the autumn of that year Mo'-hi'-çi died. This story was more than once repeated to the writers when they were seeking to obtain knowledge concerning the ritual pertaining to the tribal sacred pipes.

It is true that the authors have not used Two Crows as an authority on the rites of the sacred pole; the reason for this is that Two Crows was a layman and not sufficiently versed in the rites of his gens. The account published was obtained from the last keeper of the sacred pole. This ancient object was secured from its keeper by the authors and is now in the Peabody Museum, Harvard University.

ALICE C. FLETCHER.

FRANCIS LAFLESCHÉ.